The Return of Portly Pierre

The Crisis in America

[illegible] thanks [illegible] [illegible] a [illegible] [illegible] "America [illegible]"

Swimming [illegible] the [illegible] Salinger started [illegible] subjects ranging from Watergate to the investigation of the vice president to the JFK administration [illegible] changes [illegible].

"This [illegible] a Machiavellian theory," he said, referring to [illegible] Agnew [illegible] trying [illegible] [illegible] president [illegible] theory [illegible].

"They're using their ideas as theories that were floating around Washington two months ago, but they see the Agnew investigation in terms of the [illegible] French [illegible] conspiracy."

Salinger dismisses that theory. He believes it isn't inconceivable that the President has decided to place Agnew [illegible] [illegible] [illegible].

[illegible]

phone taps on private citizens, including me, in Paris. It's a perfectly open thing. In fact, one of the French ministers recently dedicated a phone tapping center in Paris, cut the ribbon and all.

"Just the French businessmen are concerned. They are Watergate undermining the confidence in the dollar and the world monetary situation becoming increasingly precarious.

"But my cab driver in Paris the other day praised Nixon for his detente with the Soviet Union and China and declared Watergate to be a vindication of the American system. And my own magazine has been hitting the French government for pushing its scandals under the table instead of operating like America."

Salinger's own feelings on Watergate and Nixon are perfectly clear.

"What disturbs me most is how it portrays the mentality of these men and of Nixon himself. I've been saying for 20 years that Nixon is a haunted, paranoid man who thinks everyone is out to get him.

"He was traumatized in '47 during the Hiss case. He said the liberals were out to get him. In '52, he was traumatized when his slush fund was discovered. In '60, he was traumatized because he thought the election was stolen. (I'm not commenting if it's true or not.)

"Then he got to the point where he was traumatized by one demonstrator outside the White House fence.

"I think all the Watergate activities, the domestic intelligence plans, the burglaries, the bugging, are just a reflection of those fears. And I think the whole scandal would have passed over if he had had the good judgment to separate himself from his political friends like (John) Ehrlichman and (Bob) Haldeman right away."

Salinger bristles at the suggestion that similar tactics, such as harassment of reporters, might have been used by JFK. For example, didn't Kennedy try to have David Halberstam fired by the New York Times for writing unfavorable Vietnam stories?

"That's true," says Salinger. "I tried to stop him, I told him it was a mistake, but he called the Times himself and insisted they fire Halberstam. He said later he realized it was a mistake."

And didn't Kennedy tape conversations in his office without the participants' knowledge?

"Yes, he taped conversations concerning the Bay of Pigs because of the historical significance. He probably didn't tell the people in the room."

And what about certain coverups. Did Kennedy ask the Times to suppress information about the Bay of Pigs invasion?

"I don't know about the Bay of Pigs, except that the Times had been printing long stories about covert operations that were taking place in Cuba, like training insurgents, and Kennedy asked them not to print any more.

"But I do know firsthand of two other cases when the White House asked the stories not be printed.

"One concerned the release of two American pilots who had been shot down when their plane strayed over Soviet territory. The New York Herald Tribune had the information that they were about to be released.

"When Kennedy learned of it, he called Jock Whitney and asked him not to print it or Khrushchev might call off the deal.

"Kennedy scooped the Trib himself. He announced the release at a press conference the next day."

The second case concerned the Cuban missile crisis.

"The New York Times and Washington Post both were aware that Russians had placed missiles in Cuba and were planning the story for their morning editions. The president personally called and asked them to hold off [illegible] our [illegible] into position.

"They did because they knew releasing that information could affect national security. I think it's interesting that the same two papers were asked by Nixon not to print the Pentagon Papers. They refused [illegible] they knew those papers would not jeopardize national security."

Salinger says there's much Kennedy nostalgia in the air, something he feels will help Senator Edward Kennedy in 1976.

"I think he'll run," says Salinger.

What about Chappaquiddick and the appearance of such bumper stickers as "Nobody Drowned at Watergate"?

"Chappaquiddick was a personal tragedy," [illegible] Salinger. "[illegible] happened to an individual [illegible] senator. It did not involve a president of the United States in the process of carrying out his constitutional responsibilities.

"[illegible] I know there was a [illegible] the judge in the Kennedy [illegible] saying he didn't [illegible] Kennedy [illegible] at least. The testimony was made public. And Kennedy did not have to be subpoenaed; he voluntarily turned himself in.

"They may be talking Chappaquiddick in Washington, but just go outside the nation's capital. They'd take Kennedy for president any day. He's the last living heir. He's got the name. He's been a good senator."

With the tenth anniversary of John Kennedy's death coming up in November, there are lots of Kennedy books and TV documentaries.

"John Kennedy [illegible] latter half of [illegible]

[illegible] a positive direction. I leader who is not shackled from op- [illegible] that might be [illegible] ... "The country really needs ... one gifted with leadership who understands America ... think for a minute about ... in the country now ... Congress and ... political men surround him [illegible]